

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and proposed Critical Habitat

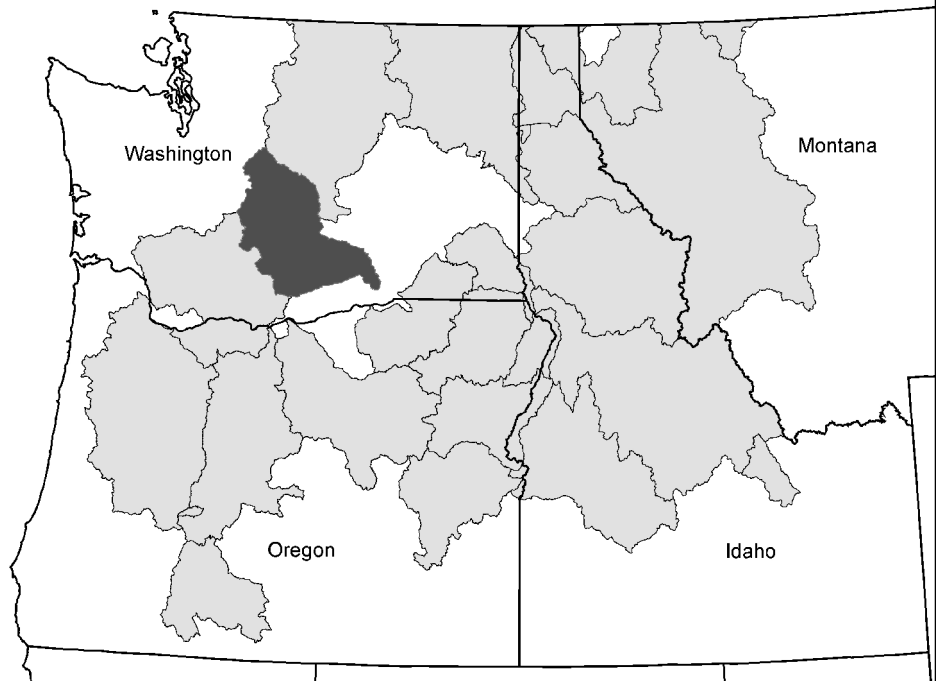
Mid-Columbia River Recovery Unit (CHAPTER 21)

What areas are included in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit?

This unit encompasses the Yakima River Basin in south central Washington to its confluence with the Columbia River near Richland, Washington. This basin drains approximately 6,155 square miles in Washington. It is bound on the west by the Cascade Range, on the north by the Wenatchee Mountains, on the east by the Rattlesnake Hills and on the south by the Horse Heaven Hills. This recovery unit geographically overlaps ceded lands of the Yakama Nation. Thirteen local populations of bull trout occur in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

The critical habitat unit involves 529 miles of rivers, streams and creeks and 14,987 acres of lakes and reservoirs (Rimrock, Bumping, Kachess, Cle Elum and Keechelus lakes). This totals approximately 5 percent of the waterways in the recovery unit.



Of the stream segments proposed as critical habitat, approximately 44 percent are bordered by Federal land, 40 percent by private land, 9 percent by State land, and 7 percent by the Yakama Nation.

Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private

landowners and industry and

conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the

current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

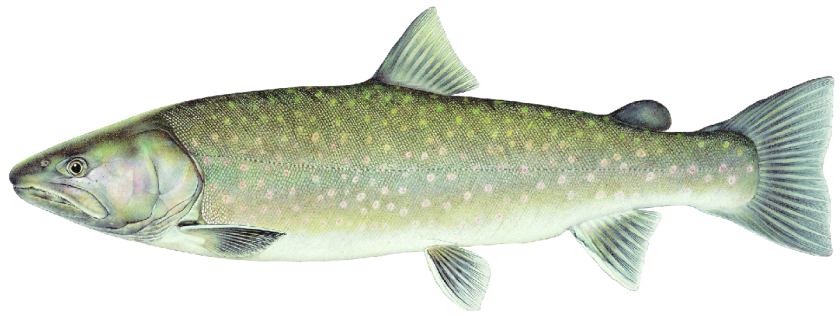
What is the relationship between the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

The primary effect of a critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect



critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or

operator of a business not involving federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

The Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit overlaps ceded lands of the Yakama Nation, which has guaranteed Treaty fishing rights for both anadromous and resident fish species. When this unit achieves its recovery goal, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Yakama Nation will determine the location and level of bull trout harvest that can be sustained while maintaining healthy bull trout populations in this area.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they

had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this area were listed as a threatened species in 1998 under the Endangered Species Act. Based on annual redd count census surveys (1996-2001), the adult migratory population size has averaged approximately 1,200 individuals. Populations in this area are isolated because of dams and associated in-stream barriers. There currently are 13 local populations within the single Yakima River basin core area. Old angling records show that bull trout in this area were once widely distributed and migrated into the lower Yakima River to forage and overwinter.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit?

The Fish and Wildlife Service considers isolation because of dams to be a major threat to bull trout in this recovery unit. Agricultural practices and associated water withdrawals also pose a threat to each local population. Other threats include improper forestry practices, effects from poor grazing methods, development, effects from mining operations, competition with non-native fish and incidental mortality by anglers.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be de-listed. To recover bull trout in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit,

been identified:

Maintain current distribution and restore populations in previously occupied bull trout areas within the recovery unit.

- Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of adult bull trout.
- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages.
- Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the core area. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

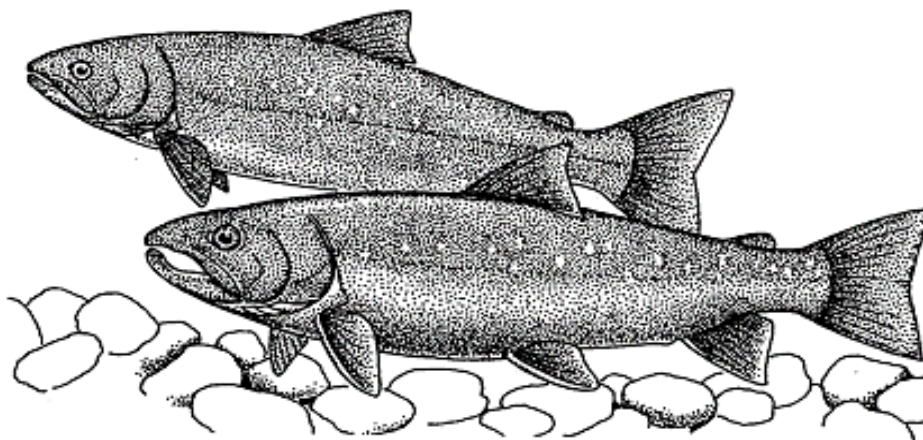
- **Distribution criteria** will be met when bull trout are distributed among 16 local populations within the recovery unit.

- **Abundance criteria** will be met when annual redd count census surveys of bull trout among all local populations in the core area number between 2,550 and 3,050 migratory adults.

- **Trend criteria** will be met when bull trout numbers are stable or increasing within the core area for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance criteria.

- **Connectivity criteria** will be met when specific impediments to migration are adequately addressed.

What actions will be



the following objectives have

necessary to recover bull trout in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit?

Actions to recover bull trout in this unit are arranged in a tiered manner and generally consist of enhancing habitat, improving water quality, restoring stream connectivity and opportunities for migration, and enhancing opportunities for genetic exchange among local bull trout populations. For this recovery unit other actions include: establishing fisheries management goals and objectives that are compatible with bull trout recovery, including developing and implementing Tribal and State native fish management plans that integrate adaptive research; preventing and reducing incidental angling mortality of bull trout; evaluating potential effects of non-native fish on bull trout; and evaluating current and proposed sport fishing regulations on bull trout.

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations (15 to 20 years) before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Middle Columbia River Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about \$35 million. This figure does not include capital improvement costs for fish passage projects, but does include estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout>.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to:

fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to:

R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

In addition, a series of public meetings and public hearings will be held in January. Times and locations will be posted on our Bull Trout website at <http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout> and publicized in local newspapers.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.